

# In Short

## FICTION

**THE LOST WORLD.** By Edwin McDowell. (Thomas Dunne/St. Martin's, \$15.95.) The people who inhabit Times Square in Edwin McDowell's contemporary novel are more reminiscent of the thieves and reprobates of Charles Dickens's 19th-century London than they are of the guys and dolls of Damon Runyon's Broadway a half century ago. Unlike the underworld characters of Runyon's fiction, Mr. McDowell's pushers, pimps and con men are sustained by neither fun nor games. Like the denizens of the London workhouse, they are driven only to survive. Alex Shaw, a reporter for a newspaper called The Free Press and the tour guide for this grim exploration of "The Lost World," is determined to wake the city's leaders to the human degradation on his beat. "Look at the kids on every street corner," he tells a colleague, "in the arcades, huddled beneath movie marquees. Then ask yourself how long it will be before New York — before America — ends up with millions of abandoned children, like India or South America." The narrative focuses on the fates of two street kids — Noah Robeson, a 14-year-old runaway from Tennessee, and Leonardo Ruis, a k a Dingo, the son of a weary prostitute and, it is rumored, her sadistic pimp. When Noah's grandfather, the dignified Reverend Robeson, enlists Shaw to join him and Dingo in their quest to locate the missing teen-ager, the lives of the reporter and the street hustler become inextricably bound. Overcoming his abhorrence of Dingo's violence and self-destructive habits, Shaw commits himself to offering escape and opportunity to "a boy who is already physically and mentally burned out at fourteen." Edwin McDowell, the author of two previous novels and a reporter for The New York Times, writes with authority about the people who inhabit the Times Square neighborhood. It is an unstated irony of this impassioned novel that its author has rendered in fictional terms his outrage at a real social injustice that, as he convincingly argues, has been neglected by every element of "respectable" society.

SIDNEY OFFIT

**SHADOW BANDS.** By Jeanne Schinto. (Ontario Review Press, Paper, \$9.95.) "Heaven," David Byrne has crooned, "is a place where nothing ever happens." The same goes for most of the very earthbound stories in "Shadow Bands," Jeanne Schinto's first collection, except that here things almost happen: a gaggle of golfers threatens to molest a young girl, a greengrocer sets out to proposition a woman who flirts with him at work, a teen-ager almost wins the trust of a neighbor's neglected child. In the few cases in which something does transpire, Ms. Schinto self-consciously withholds important details, leaving her plots full of holes and her conclusions frustrating. Still, her work does show some promise. In "The Motorcycle Riders," for example, she spins a delicate psychological tale that is studded with tiny epiphanies. A symbol of freedom and danger, the motorcycle of the title dramatizes the differences be-

## Mr. Bass Man

In 1935, the Cab Calloway Orchestra, barnstorming its way back to the Cotton Club after making a film in Hollywood, arrived in Chicago in need of a bassist. Mr. Calloway hired Milt Hinton, an unheralded 25-year-old Chicagoan, intending to replace him in New York. Sixteen years later, Mr. Hinton was still there, having established himself as one of the leading bassists in jazz. Mr. Hinton has since enjoyed a richly varied career, recording with artists ranging from Billie Holiday and Benny Goodman to Aretha Franklin and Paul McCartney. In **BASS LINE: The Stories and Photographs of Milt Hinton** (Temple University, \$39.95), written with David G. Berger, who teaches sociology at Temple University, Mr. Hinton tells his own story with eloquent simplicity. He describes his childhood in Vicksburg, Miss., where he witnessed a lynching as a child, and his life on Chicago's South Side, where he once had a summer job in a dry-cleaning shop that was a front for a numbers game controlled by Al Capone. But the text is only the beginning of the story here. For the last 50 years, Mr. Hinton's hobby has been photography, and approximately 200 of his photographs of his musical peers are included here. With evocative shots like those of a scholarly-looking Fats Waller preparing an arrangement for Mr. Calloway, an impossibly young and intense-looking Dizzy Gillespie dozing in a Pullman car and a drawn and tired Billie Holiday skeptically listening to playbacks during one of her last recording sessions, Mr. Hinton shows us private moods seldom captured on album covers or in conventional photos of musicians in action.

FRANCIS DAVIS



Billie Holiday at a recording studio in New York City, about 1958.

tween the narrator, who wants to discard the bike after an accident, and her husband, who wants to repair it. ("When you're in the car you're in a box," he explains. "On the cycle you're sky-diving.") She tries to dissuade him, yet can't help remembering the elation she felt as they were thrown from the seat during the crash. While many of the tales in "Shadow Bands" involve a clear moral question, "The Motorcycle Riders" explores the gray zone between right and wrong, and it's punchier as a consequence. When Ms. Schinto forswears the primness that afflicts most of these stories, her writing ascends from the mundane to the memorable.

MARGOT MIFFLIN

**ONE.** By Richard Bach. (Silver Arrow/Morrow, \$17.95.) There's no denying that "One" presents a number of provocative speculations: What would it be like to meet yourself when you were older or younger? How would your life turn out if you had made different choices, split up with your spouse, been born in a different time and place? These are matters worth fretting over in the middle of a sleepless night. But in the hands of Richard Bach, best known for the best-selling novel "Jonathan Livingston Seagull," they quickly plunge into the realm of the asinine. We know we're in deep trouble as early as page 12, where the Bachs

(Richard and his wife, Leslie) announce, "We've become Rileschardie, no longer knowing where one of us ends and the other begins." Uh oh. Assume the brace position for a freaky adventure in their seaplane, which gets lost in space-time somewhere off the coast of California. With love and hope as their guides, and "what matters most" as their destination, the Bachs touch down in different times and places, where they commune with some of their alternate selves: Richard and Leslie when they first met (but years before they knew they were soul mates); Richard and Leslie if they had been named Ivan and Tatiana and lived in the Soviet Union; Richard and Leslie as a sad old couple who never took the risks they had always dreamed about. To appreciate the spirit of this book, you must think metaphorically. Just as a television has many channels, everyone has many lifetimes that are going on simultaneously — it's just that you're tuned into only one at a time. Give yourself a gold star for patience if you actually make it through to the final pages, where the Bachs realize that all of us are really a single person.

JOYCE COHEN

**ARE YOU LISTENING RABBI LOW.** By J. P. Donleavy. (Atlantic Monthly Press, \$18.95.) Siggie (Isadorable) Schultz has written a play: "Kiss It, Don't Hold It, It's Too Hot." It's a monster hit. So the American-born Schultz struts and frets around London's West End, enjoying his impresario status and waiting for the show to open on Broadway. But his theatrical partners, the odious Lord Nectarine and the effete Binky Sunningdale, plot his ruin. And when Schultz finds that he also has to deal with a wife who leaps off Tower Bridge, a potentially emasculating personal accident, troops of scandal-hungry journalists and regiments of lascivious women, the real charlatan in him emerges. His bawdy, wickedly funny progress through the stranger echelons of English society is gently watched by the imagined figure of Rabbi Löw, the ancestral shade who acts as Schultz's conscience. And the conversations between them take us inside Schultz and away from the pageant of grotesqueries that is J. P. Donleavy's London, providing glimpses of Schultz's childhood experiences in his parents' lingerie outlet in Woonsocket, R.I., as well as his adult misgivings about the proprieties of British life. In "Are You Listening Rabbi Löw," Mr. Donleavy's urgent prose drives Schultz as he bludgeons his way through various sexual adventures, not to mention a game of indoor cricket played with a croquet mallet and fruit bowled by a Valkyrie, as well as a royal visit to "Kiss It." This book will please Mr. Donleavy's devotees, especially since the style employed here by the

## THE PIANO TEACHER.

By Elfriede Jelinek. Translated by Joachim Neugroschel. (Weldensfeld & Nicolson, \$18.95.) This is the first novel to appear in English by the Austrian writer Elfriede Jelinek, who won the Heinrich Böll prize in 1986. First published in Europe in 1983, "The Piano Teacher" caused quite a stir; it was called pornographic by some critics and brilliant by others. In Joachim Neugroschel's excellent translation, the language is simple yet full of imaginative, often darkly funny metaphors; the view of the world original, if at times almost painfully bizarre. "The Piano Teacher" is an exploration of fascism, not so much in the political sense as in the personal. Erika Kohut, a repressed



Elfriede Jelinek

36-year-old piano teacher at the Vienna Conservatory, lives with her tyrannical old mother, with whom she is locked in a cycle of love, hate and need. There is no room for men in their airtight world — until one of Erika's students, a blond, athletic know-it-all named Walter Klemmer, decides, just for fun, to seduce Erika. But the fun soon turns sour as Erika learns that she cannot have pleasure without pain and Walter discovers his inherent capacity for violence, leading to a shocking, pessimistic climax. Some may find Ms. Jelinek's ruthlessly unsentimental approach — not to mention her image of Vienna as a bleak city of porno shops, poor immigrants and loveless copulations — too much to take. Her picture of a passive woman who can gain control over her life only by becoming a victim is truly frightening. Less squeamish readers will extract a feminist message: in a society such as this, how else can a woman like Erika behave?

CHARLOTTE INNES

author of "The Ginger Man" matches the raciness of Schultz's existence in a theatrical world where connections disappear and concepts float in search of a backer. Mr. Donleavy's 10th novel is high farce, immense fun and not for the prudish. ANDREW ST. GEORGE

**SWORD POINT.** By Harold Coyle. (Simon & Schuster, \$18.95.) What if the Soviet Union invaded Iran? What if the United States counter-invaded? What if Iran produced a nuclear bomb? From the possible answers to these questions, Harold Coyle, the author of the best-selling novel "Team Yankee," has fashioned another tale of combat and those who die in it. There is a host of characters in "Sword Point," but few have faces. The most sharply drawn is Lieutenant Ilvanish, a heroic commander who has to contend with political machinations as well as events on the battlefield. But don't look for character development; this is an action story. The Russians hope to get a stranglehold on the West's oil supply without starting World War III. The United States hopes to frustrate them in a small arena. Caught between the "Lesser" and "Greater" Satans, the Iranians intend to reduce all to a cinder in one last explosion of Islamic fury — a catastrophe that can be prevented only by a coalition of Russians and Americans. In exploring this scenario, "Sword Point" sets up a fast-paced series of violent battle scenes punctuated by vignettes of planning and preparing for war. An Army officer, Major Coyle is at his best when he's depicting soldiers facing death by bullets, fire and detonation. There are some flaws and stereotypes in his novel, to be sure (Americans, Russians and Iranians all behave, for example, as we have been conditioned to expect), but they never detract from the reader's involvement in this entertaining story. Mr. Coyle knows soldiers, and he understands the brotherhood-of-arms mystique that transcends national boundaries.

JOHN GLENN

## NONFICTION

**ARTICLE 19 WORLD REPORT 1988: Information, Freedom and Censorship.** Edited by Kevin Boyle. (Times Books, \$22.50.) In Rumania you cannot own a typewriter without the Government's permission. In Kenya you cannot circulate copies of the Constitution. In Ireland you cannot publish or provide information about abortion. In Iraq you can be executed for insulting the President. Laws like these are compiled in "Article 19 World Report 1988," a description of the more and less deadly forms of censorship in 50 countries issued by Article 19, a human rights organization dedicated to defending the freedom of thought and opinion promised by the 19th article of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In authoritarian states, according to the report, edited by the group's executive director, Kevin Boyle, censorship operates most crudely through the assassination, kidnapping and imprisonment of journalists and dissidents. The licensing and bribing of journalists, discriminating use of economic sanctions and control of production machinery tame the press as well, making it an arm of the state. Western democracies, the report says, curb dissent through official secrets acts, prohibitions on publishing and discussing information deemed harmful to national security and laws pertaining to defamation, libel and obscenity. Speech is more subtly suppressed and homogenized by burgeoning media oligarchies and the tyranny of commerce in the West. A preface by William Shawcross, the author of "Side-show" and "The Shah's Last Ride," underscores the importance of free speech: In a world of AIDS and nuclear power plants, it is a public health imperative.

WENDY KAMINER

**GRACIE: A Love Story.** By George Burns. (Putnam, \$16.95.) Reading George Burns's loving tribute to his late wife, the comedienne Gracie Allen, is the next best thing to watching reruns of the couple's long-running 1950's television series. Burns and Allen were married, both on stage and off, for 40 years. They began as a vaudeville act in the 1920's, graduated to radio in the 1930's, then gave television one of its first and most memorable situation comedies from 1952 to 1958. The key to the act's success was not Mr. Burns, who always played the straight man, nor the material, which could sometimes be corny even by vaudeville standards. What kept the show going was Allen, who used her

**JUST IN TIME: Notes From My Life.** By Phyllis Newman. (Simon & Schuster, \$18.95.) Phyllis Newman is a talented actress and musical comedy performer with a Tony award to her credit, a show business personality who was one of Johnny Carson's first guests and, more recently, a featured performer on a popular soap opera. However, as she would probably be the first to admit, she does not have the sort of following that would stampede to the bookstores for her memoirs. She is married to the lyricist and librettist Adolph Green and counts among her friends Leonard Bernstein, Stephen Sondheim and Lauren Bacall, yet there is neither scandal nor great revelations to be found on the pages of "Just in Time." Even for those with a simple passion for the New York theater scene, Ms. Newman provides, for the most part, only passing glimpses of the backstage life of the



Phyllis Newman.

shows with which she has been involved. Nonetheless, this is a compelling book. Ms. Newman confronts breast cancer and two mastectomies and comes to terms with how the surgery affects her self-image. What catches the reader by surprise is that there is no maudlin tone, no "I survived and you can, too" sermons. Instead, there is anger — real, screaming anger that gradually resolves itself into understanding, if not full acceptance — tempered, as always, by humor. The flightiness of the prose, usually charming, also can be frustrating. There are times when one wishes she would pause and reveal more, and there are moments when Ms. Newman seems to see the world through the lyrics of show tunes. Nevertheless, her gut responses to her illness ring painfully true and make the reading worthwhile.

ARNOLD ARONSON

exquisite comic timing to transform a stock "dizzy dame" character into what Mr. Burns calls "the national symbol of misunderstanding." Gracie's role as the dumb wife is dated, but her "illogical logic" can still draw laughs: she once determined to meet Babe Ruth and his twin brother, for instance, after reading that the Babe's double had won a game. She also once threatened to run for governor of the State of Coma, saying she had been there for years, and sometime later announced her candidacy for President on the Surprise Party. After she retired in 1958, Allen's heart ailments gradually worsened. She died in 1964 at the age of 58. Mr. Burns tells her story as if he were doing a stand-up comedy routine; he even lets the reader know when he is puffing on his cigar as a signal to laugh. This entertaining monologue is the kind of memorial that would please any comic for one simple reason: it leaves the audience with a smile.

DIANE COLE

**POET: An Autobiography in Three Parts. Volume One: The Younger Son.** By Karl Shapiro. (Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, \$17.95.) Robert Frost once said that the word "poet" was a praise word and that you should never use it about yourself. Karl Shapiro tosses such wisdom to the wind in the first volume of his three-part autobiography, "Poet," written in the third person with the author referring to himself as, what else, "the poet." Mr. Shapiro has been one of this country's most prominent poets for more than 40 years, winning the Pulitzer Prize in 1945 for "V-Letter and Other Poems." Though there is something unabashedly bold and self-aggrandizing about this book, there is also an honest declaration of pride in the poetic vocation. "The Younger Son" begins with Mr. Shapiro's childhood and adolescence in Baltimore and touches on his experiences in and out of the University of Virginia and Johns Hopkins University. How Mr. Shapiro came to embrace the American modernism of William Carlos Williams while rejecting the more esoteric European modernism of Eliot and Pound makes for interesting reading. Despite the book's title, Mr. Shapiro's relationships with his family are hardly touched upon. We learn that his father was a small-business man and urged his son toward a career in business as well, but not much more. The book gains momentum, however, when Mr. Shapiro is drafted during World War II and assigned as a clerk in a medical unit in the South Pacific. The image of a young man furiously writing poetry while caring for wounded soldiers creates a startling contrast. There is a relaxed and sometimes chaotic quality to the book, as if, with so much more material to come, Mr. Shapiro has chosen to present his experiences slowly. Whether readers will sustain their interest, and whether Mr. Shapiro can shape his life into a coherent and rather long work of art, are questions Volumes Two and Three will have to answer.

ANDY BRUMER

**ZOO: A Behind-the-Scenes Look at the Animals and the People Who Care for Them.** By Don Gold. (Contemporary Books, \$18.95.) Sandwiched between Lake Michigan and some of the costliest residential real estate in Chicago lie the 35 acres of the Lincoln Park Zoo. At a time when zoos are sprawling, expensive all-day affairs, the free Lincoln Park Zoo can be walked in less than two hours for the optional cost of a bag of popcorn.

The common sights — lolling lions, pacing tigers and polar bears somersaulting in their pool — are set against an uncommon backdrop of high rises and highways. Don Gold, a Chicago writer and editor, goes backstage to show another zoo, one whose committed, underpaid keepers preach world conservation and practice it personally by taking sick small animals home at night to nurse. Behind the scenes, zoo life is a mixture of drudgery and drama. Mr. Gold shows the keepers on their rounds of cleaning and feeding and the curators shuffling through paperwork or romancing potential donors. The backstage zoo comes into focus through 16 first-person stories that by turns are delightful or self-serving, naive or careful, informative or taciturn when the speaker is happier with animals than people. In this production, what happens offstage is far more dramatic than what the audience sees.

LAURA GREEN



Woodcut from "The Reshaping of Everyday Life 1790-1840."

**THE RESHAPING OF EVERYDAY LIFE 1790-1840.** By Jack Larkin. (Harper & Row, \$19.95.)

Intended for the general reader, "The Reshaping of Everyday Life" ranges over a vast landscape of cultural detail as it reconstructs daily life during the first 50 years of the American Republic. Recounting the customs and styles of life of ordinary people during a period of rapid and unsettling social and economic change, Jack Larkin, the chief historian at Old Sturbridge Village, the outdoor history museum in Sturbridge, Mass., illuminates an astonishing range of activities. These include infant feeding; the care of chamber pots, privies and graveyards; the use of broadside ballads, parlor songs and communal dances; the celebration of holidays and routines of travel; the production, design and use of clothing and household items; even the treatment of pets. Habits of speech and manners are sketched, as well as broad patterns of work, religion, sexuality and family life. Virtually all human activity in the late 18th and early 19th centuries comes in for scrutiny in this compact and insightful work. Mr. Larkin paints a portrait of the United States during a time of intense and anxious transition. New technologies created a quiet domestic revolution that allowed many Americans — depending on their class, race, and sex — an increasingly comfortable existence. Despite these reforms, some Americans lamented the passing of a more boisterous past. But progress has its costs. As the author is careful to point out, in 19th-century America, cultural advances heralded an increasing gap between the respectable and the disreputable, the country and the city, and especially the wealthy and the poor.

JOYCE ANTLE